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AUTHOR Collier, Catherine
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ABSTRACT

A study of the characteristics of Hispanic elementary school children in bilingual education programs attempted to identify those education and acculturation characteristics which distinguished children who had been referred to special education from nonreferred children. The sample consisted of 95 Hispanic children, of whom 51 had never been referred and 44 had been referred to special education. Of those referred, only 17 had been placed in special education programs. Contrary to expectations, the results indicated no significant differences between groups for any educational characteristic except degree of teacher concern, but achievement was found to be related to years of bilingual instruction, language proficiency, minority enrollment, and overall acculturation level. In addition, there was a meaningful effect size between the achievement of non-referred and that of placed children. Placed children tended to be the most acculturated and more often came from schools with low minority enrollment. Those referred but not placed were the least acculturated and had the lowest achievement in all content areas. The findings imply that culturally and linguistically different children are disproportionately referred for special education, possibly as a function of minority enrollment and availability of alternative programs, and that the psychodynamics of acculturation must be considered in the identification and instruction of culturally and linguistically different children with special needs. (Author/MSE)

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THE REFERRAL OF HISPANIC CHILDREN TO SPECIAL EDUCATION:

A Comparison of Acculturation and Education Characteristics of Referred and Nonreferred Culturally and Linguistically Different Children

by

Catherine Collier, Ph.D.
University of Colorado
1985

A Paper presented at the NABE 1986 Conference, Chicago, Illinois

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Summary

This study investigated the acculturation and education characteristics of culturally/linguistically different elementary children who had been enrolled in bilingual programs. The purpose of the study was to identify those education and acculturation characteristics which distinguised children who had been referred to special education from nonreferred children. The effect of interaction of these characteristics upon predicting referral and placement was also examined. The sample consisted of 95 Hispanic children who had been enrolled in bilingual education programs. Of these, 51 had never been referred and 44 had been referred to special education. Of those referred, 27 were not placed and 17 were placed in special education programs. A scale to rate the degree of acculturation was developed as well as comparative profiles.

There were several major findings. Contrary to expectations, no statistically significant differences were found between groups for any education characteristic other than degree of teacher concern. However, achievement was found to be significantly related to years of bilingual instruction, language proficiency, minority enrollment, and overall level of acculturation.* In addition, there was a meaningful effect size between the achievement of non-referred and placed. Another major finding was that there were significant differences between groups for level of acculturation and on several acculturation characteristics. Placed children tended to be the most acculturated and more often came from schools with low minority enrollment. Those referred but not placed were the least acculturated and had the lowest achievement levels in all content areas.

The implications are that culturally/linguistically different children are still disproportionately referred, possibly as a function of minority enrollment and availability of alternative programs, and that the psychodynamics of acculturation must be considered in the identification and instruction of culturally and linguistically different children with special needs.

*not assimilation

Statement of the Problem

One of the most controversial issues currently facing educators in public school districts throughout the United States is the identification and referral of culturally and linguistically different children for placement in special education programs. Personnel involved in the referral and placement of these children into special assistance programs need to be able to identify both the potential exceptional educational characteristics and the cultural and linguistic characteristics of these children in order to make informed and appropriate decisions. The interactive effects of these characteristics upon the child experiencing cultural and/or linguistic adaptation, i.e., acculturation, must be taken into account in the referral/placement decision. Without this knowledge, education personnel cannot make appropriate identification, referral, and service decisions for the culturally and linguistically different child.

Over the past decade, the disproportionate referral (both over and under referral and placement of minority children) has become a matter of increasing concern to educators in public schools. This population is sometimes referred to as bilingual handicapped children and, more appropriately, as culturally and linguistically different exceptional children. Concerns about the special educational needs of culturally and linguistically different (CLD) children has been summarized by Hilliard (1980) in his statement that:

> There are some children who are handicapped in one way or another. Some, not all, of these require skilled special assistance to benefit from education. The critical questions are these: Are we finding the right children? Are we providing valid services for those we do find? (p. 584)

It is evident from a review of previous research that the interrelationship of cultural and educational characteristics is central to answering questions about appropriate identification, referral and instruction of culturally and linguistically different exceptional children. It is also evident from a review of these studies that the results of acculturation research have not been considered in this interrelationship.

There is ample evidence that cultural, linguistic, and psychological changes occur among populations which affect their interaction with mainstream American society (Berry, 1970; Witkin & Berry, 1975). Knowledge about the characteristics and needs of culturally and linguistically different exceptional children is incomplete without a knowledge of the effects of these changes, i.e., acculturation, upon this population. This is especially true in that the effects of acculturation are similar to and may be confused with some of the behaviors for which children are referred to special education. Knowledge about these characteristics and needs of this population is incomplete without a knowledge of the effects of acculturation upon this population and how these acculturational factors relate to exceptionality.

Children in need of special assistance will continue to be identified and placed in special education classrooms. It is important that all of their special needs be identified, delineating those characteristics of exceptionality from those characteristics of acculturation, and appropriate services be provided. The results of this study provide guidance in developing appropriate training for school personnel in the identification and comprehensive instruction of the culturally different population in public schools. This study provides information about the acculturation and education characteristics of culturally and linguistically different exceptional children which will aid educational personnel in making

appropriate referral decisions, providing appropriate instruction and assisting this population of children to achieve their maximum potential.

This study examined the presence and the interaction between educational and cultural/linguistic characteristics of culturally and linguistically different children experiencing acculturation in the public school system. It examined and identifed which of these characteristics differentiated children referred for special education placement from nonreferred culturally and linguistically different children. The results and conclusions of this study provide guidance in developing appropriate training for school personnel in the identification, referral and instruction of the culturally and linguistically different exceptional population in the public schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify those acculturational and educational factors which distinguish culturally and linguistically different children referred for special education services from those never referred for special services. It was a further purpose of this study to provide a preliminary exploration of the interaction of educational and acculturational factors in identifying, placing, and developing programs for bilingual special education students and provide suggestions for developing appropriate training for school personnel in this concern.

Definition of Terms

Acculturation: A type of cultural change initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultures. The dynamics of acculturation include selective adaptation of the value system, integration and differentiation processes.

Acculturation does not mean assimilation. It refers to the process by which members of one culture adapt to the presence of another culture. This adaptation may be through integration, assimilation, rejection, or deculturation (Padilla, 1980).

Convergence: The interaction of an exceptional condition(s) and the cultural and linguistic characteristics of an individual. The effect of being deaf upon the acculturation of a Spanish speaking child is an example of convergence. Another is differing attitudes within particular cultural groups toward an exceptional condition and the effect of this upon a culturally/linguistically different exceptional child's development and learning.

Culturally and linguistically different: An individual whose native culture is not of mainstream America and whose native language is not English. The individual may or may not be acculturated to some extent and may or may not be relatively proficient in English or his/her native language.

Exceptional: A condition which requires modification of the regular instructional program in order for a child to achieve his/her maximum potential.

Special education: Specifically designed instruction for children whose educational needs cannot be addressed effectively in the regular school program without adaptation or modification.

Sampling

The sample for this study consisted of elementary students who were identified as culturally and linguistically different by a local school district and enrolled in bilingual/ESL programs in the district prior to the 1984-85 school year. The school district was asked to provide information on 100 students randomly selected from their bilingual/ESL programs. The sample consisted of

95 bilingual children, 51 of whom had never been referred to special education and 44 of whom had been referred to special education. The referred students included 27 referred but not placed and 17 referred and placed in special education within the last two years. The sample was drawn from a district wide bilingual/ESL program serving grades K-6. Students become eligible for services from this program by meeting national and state criteria of cultural and linguistic difference. All of these students are considered of limited English proficiency to some extent and of cultural backgrounds other than mainstream American. All of the students selected by the district for this study were identified as Hispanic.

Research Design

The students were compared on 15 acculturation and education variables selected on the basis of an extensive review of the literature. The acculturation variables were selected from research into the effect of various cultural and linguistic factors upon the successful acculturation of culturally and linguistically different students in this country (Alder, 1975; Juffer, 1983; Padilla, 1980). The education variables were those regularly considered in the referral and placement of any child in special education (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1981; Knoff, 1983; Smith, 1982).

Composite scores for the two major variable categories, acculturation and educational achievement, were also considered. A scale for rating relative degree of acculturation was developed based upon the variables and research cited above. A copy of the scale is attached in the appendix. This scale was submitted to 15 professionals for review and modification.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this study is based upon a holistic view of identifying and providing for the special needs of children. That is that the needs of the whole child must be identified and provided for in an integrated curriculum before it can be said that his/her needs have been met. The children in the bilingual special education population are children who may have special linguistic, cultural and educational characteristics which may distinguish them from 'regular' bilingual children and which may assist in identifying their special learning needs.

In examining cultural and linguistic characteristics, the additional factor of acculturation must be considered. Acculturation is a process which affects any person exposed to a different cultural and social environment. Of the four general acculturative outcomes (i.e., integration, assimilation, rejection, and marginality) integration was selected as the adaptive goal against which the children were rated. The acculturation scale developed was based upon research into how successful cultural integration takes place in a population experiencing acculturation.

Both acculturation and education variables have been featured in previous studies of identification and referral of culturally and linguistically different children. However, the intraction of these characteristics has rarely been examined. This interaction is a central concern in the theory of convergence which this study examined. Convergence refers to the unique characteristics of culturally and linguistically different exceptional children, composed of three elements which must be considered separately and together: exceptional conditions, cultural/linguistic background, and the interaction of these characteristics.

A review of the literature led to the expectation that within a randomly selected group of school children, those referred and/or placed in special education would differ significantly from those not referred or placed, particularly in regard to achievement and ability. In previous studies, the cultural and linguistic differences between mainstream and minority became an additional factor in whether or not a child was referred and/or placed. In this study, however, all of the children were from the same cultural and linguistic background. As they were also from the same nontransient socioeconomic background and age range, it was expected that the children should be relatively homogeneous in regard to cultural and linguistic variables, with some differences between individual children. In theory, pre-investigation expectations were that referred and nonreferred children would differ on their education profile but not on their acculturation (cultural and linguistic) profile.

Main Hypotheses

The study examined the following main research question:

> In what acculturational and educational ways do nonreferred culturally and linguistically different children differ from those referred to special education?

The following questions were asked:

1. How do culturally and lingustically different (CLD) children referred to special education differ from nonreferred CLD children on selected acculturation and education variables?

2. How do referred but not placed CLD children differ from placed CLD children on selected acculturation and education variables?

3. How do nonreferred CLD children differ from placed CLD children on selected acculturation and education variables?

4. How do nonreferred CLD children differ from referred but not placed CLD children on selected acculturation and education variables?

5. Are there any significant correlations between selected acculturation and education variables?

Findings and Conclusions

Contrary to theoretical expectations, the referred and nonreferred groups did not statistically significantly differ on their education profiles but did differ on their acculturation profiles. Findings also indicated a strong interaction and correlation between particular acculturation and education variables. Although 'academic' concerns were cited as the primary reason for referral, there was no statistically significant difference in achievement test scores in any content area. There was a meaningful effect size between nonreferred and placed children. A significant interaction was found between minority enrolllment and educational achievement.

Differences were found between referred/not placed and referred/placed subjects on selected acculturation variables: LAU cagetory, language proficiency, and acculturation. There were no significant differences for any education variable between these referral groups.

Differences were found between nonreferred and referred/placed subjects on selected acculturation variables: LAU category, language proficiency, minority enrollment, and acculturation. There were no significant differences between non-referred and placed groups on any educational variable other than degree of teacher concern.

No significant differences were found between nonreferred and referred/not placed subjects on selected acculturation and education variables.

A significant interaction was found between minority enrollment and educational achievement. Nonreferred subjects had higher educational achievement in schools with high minority enrollment while placed subjects had higher educational achievement in schools with low minority enrollment.

A significant relationship also was found between years in bilingual programs and educational achievement. Nonreferred subjects with more years of bilingual instruction had better educational achievement than nonreferred subjects with fewer years of bilingual/ESL instruction. This relationship between high educational achievement and years of bilingual instruction was significant for the entire sample population. This was also found to be true for language proficiency. A significant relationship was found between language proficiency and educational achievement for all referral status groups.

A significant relationship was found between years in the United States and educational achievement. Referred but not placed subjects who had been in the United States more than four years were significantly higher in educational achievement than those who had been in the United States fewer than four years. The relationship between more years in the United States and level of educational achievement was statistically significant for the population as a whole. A significant relationship also was found between level of acculturation and educational achievement for all referral status groups. The population as a whole performed better on educational achievement the higher the level of acculturation.

It may be concluded from these findings that culturally and linguistically different children continue to be disproportionately referred and placed in special education, both over- and under-referred/placed. It may be concluded further that the psychodynamics of acculturation are clearly a

factor in referral and placement and must be considered in the identification and instruction of culturally and linguistically different children with special needs.

Implications

The literature indicated that disproportionate referral to special education of culturally and linguistically different children decreased when minority enrollment increased and bilingual education programs were available (Finn, 1982). This research supported this finding as well as suggesting that bilingual education appears to improve educational achievement for all culturally and linguistically different children. The finding that nonreferred culturally and linguistically different children apparently did better educationally in schools with high minority enrollment may be due to differences in the quality of the available alternative programs including bilingual instruction. It may also be related to the presence of role models, improved self concept, etc. There is also the possibility that CLD children are over-referred in schools with low minority enrollment while under-referred in schools with high minority enrollment. Expectations may be lower in high minority schools or teachers may be less willing to risk censure for referring minority children with learning and behavior problems.

Some of the literature indicated that differences in education variables were to be expected between children referred to special education and those not referred to special education. Other prior research indicated that differences in educational achievement and overall ability may not be as significant in referral as other education variables, such as reason for referral (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1981). The results of this study indicate that culturally and linguistically different children referred to special

education do not appear to differ significantly from those not referred in achievement and ability but do differ in degree of teacher concern. Although they did not differ significantly on their educational profile, all children were referred for 'academic' reasons rather than 'behavior' or other reasons. The implications are that regular classroom teachers need improved training in the identification of learning problems among and appropriate instruction for the culturally and linguistically different. The availability of alternative programs and intervention alternatives for concerned teachers may be indicated.

The literature indicated that there should be only slight individual differences in acculturation variables within a population of the same age, socioeconomic status and ethnic backgound. However, the results of this study indicate that culturally and linguistically different children referred to special education differ significantly in acculturation characteristics from those not referred. Placed students appeared to be more highly acculturated, more bilingual, and more English proficient than either nonreferred or referred/not placed students. Referred but not placed students appeared to be the least acculturated, least proficient in English, and had the lowest achievement scores. Taken in conjunction with the minority enrollment findings, it may be that in low minority enrollment schools culturally and linguistically different children are referred more frequently, but only the most acculturated and English proficient of these CLD children are actually placed. One possible explanation for this is that the staffing teams may be sensitive to the difficulties inherent in assessing possible exceptionality in a less acculturated limited English proficient student and may defer full staffing and/or placement until the student is more acculturated and more proficient. In high minority enrollment schools, bilingual or ESL instruction

may be used as an intervention of "at risk" children referred, but not placed in special education. This may or may not be the best alternative program for these children. A copy of recommended alternative intervention programs for the referred CLD child is attached in the appendix.

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APPENDIX

CCDES ACCULTURATION SCALE

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Acculturation refers to adjustment or adaptation to a new cultural/social environment. This adaptation may be manifested in several ways: integration, assimilation, rejection, or marginality. The CCDES Acculturation Scale is based upon research on the factors predictive of the degree of successful integration by persons experiencing culture shock.

Cross Cultural Developmental Education Services
Los Lagos Ranch
Rollinsville, CO 80474

CCDES ACCULTURATION SCALE
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Name _____ School _____

Date of Birth _____ Sex _____ Grade _____

Language(s) spoken at home _____

	Raw Data	CCDESA Scale Score
Number of years, United States	_____	____
Number of years, school district	_____	____
Number of years, ESL and/or bilingual education	_____	____
LAU category	_____	____
Native language proficiency	_____	____
English language proficiency	_____	____
Ethnicity/Nation of origin	_____	____
Percentage minority enrollment in attending school	_____	____
	CCDESA Scale Score Total	[ ]

CCDESA Scale Score Guidelines

Number of years, US/SD	Number of years, ESL/BE	LAU category
Under 2 = 1	0.0 - 1.0 = 1	A = 1
2-3 = 2	1.1 - 1.5 = 2	B = 2
4-5 = 3	1.6 - 2.0 = 3	C = 3
6-7 = 4	2.1 - 2.5 = 4	D = 4
8-9 = 5	2.6 - 3.0 = 5	E = 5

Ethnicity	Percentage enrollment	Language proficiency
Native American = 1	81% - 100% = 1	Least proficient = 1
Hispanic = 2	61% - 80% = 2	= 2
Asian/Pac. Is. = 3	41% - 60% = 3	= 3
Black/MidEast = 4	21% - 40% = 4	= 4
White/European = 5	0% - 20% = 5	Most proficient = 5

CCDESA Scale based upon research by Adler, 1975; Berry, 1980; Collier, 1983; and Juffer, 1983.

REFERRAL PROCESS AND SERVICE OPTIONS FOR CLDF (Collier 1984)

Referral

1. Teacher brings specific problem(s) to attention of Building Team
2. Appropriate interventions are suggested and implemented

Building Level

Intervention Service Options

1. assistance to teacher
   a. academic interventions
   b. behavior interventions
   c. social/peer interventions
   d. special education interventions
   e. Bilingual education interventions
   f. other
2. psycho/social assistance
   a. counseling
   b. support groups
   c. social services
   d. social survival
   e. cross-cultural counseling
   f. acculturation assistance
   g. other
3. physical assistance
   a. medical
   b. nutrition
   c. sensory evaluation
   d. environmental modifications
   e. other
4. experiential assistance (due to mobility, trauma, etc.)
   a. high interest/low vocabulary
   b. school survival
   c. metacognitive/learning strategy
   d. sociolinguistic development
   e. "remedial" basic skills
   f. curriculum adaptation
   g. other
5. "slow learner"
   a. developmental curricula
   b. modifications of reg. curricula
   c. assistance to teacher
   d. training for teacher
   e. NLCRT with special training
   f. other
6. language development
   a. intensive ESL/L1-L2 development
   b. INREAL
   c. NLCRT
7. Other

If the problem is not resolved by interventions, and if as a result of these interventions, new patterns and indications arise, school may try other indicated interventions or may recommend staffing.

District Level

Staffing

Formal and informal assessment in regard to specific concern or suspected handicapping condition taking into consideration:

1) Assess sociolinguistic competence and language proficiency in L1 and L2.
2) If primary language is not English, assess in the primary language.
3) If balanced bilinguals, assess in both L1 and L2.
4) If limited proficiency in either language, use linguistic and non-language dependent measures in both languages.
5) Use a multidimensional approach by a multidisciplinary team.
6) Various optimization procedures should be tried.
7) Review tests and procedures for culture-specific bias.
8) Individualized Education Plan (IEP) should reflect the total needs.

1. No handicap determined. Go back to various alternative service option; and/or interven ion techniques

2. Handicap determined.
   a. placement in special educ.
   b. IEP development must include:
      1) L1/L2 needs and who is responsible for service
      2) integration of SE/BE
      3) how NLCRT or other language assistance is utilized in meeting special needs as well as needs of whole child.